

RIGHTS OF WAY COMMITTEE

The Rockport Rights of Way Committee is composed of dedicated volunteers who work collaboratively and earnestly to carry out our charge to “identify, mark and maintain access to public property and public rights of way over private property” so that the public can enjoy Rockport’s special open spaces in the woods and along the shore.

2020 was a very difficult year for the committee. We held just two monthly meetings in 2020 before the onset of COVID-19 and the prohibition on public meetings in Rockport until further notice, thereby abruptly stopping plans for a continuation of collaborative planning with other open-space organizations in Rockport, and many other trail maintenance plans for 2020. Regularly scheduled online meetings of the committee did not begin again until September.

2020 was a very difficult year for the committee for another reason—challenges to long-standing public rights of way by two property owners along the historic Atlantic Path that quickly devolved into legal matters rather than the hoped-for thoughtful discussions and resolutions through open dialogue with the committee.

The work of the Rights of Way Committee is both delicate and arduous. Well beyond the simple maintenance of local trails, the committee constantly must deftly navigate the issues of private property rights and public rights of access; property owner desires and public desires; and historic access and contemporary motives. Whenever possible, the committee strives to arrive at a both-and solution that will preserve continued access by the public while respecting private property rights and ensuring the safety of all.

We are sometimes asked what helpful role the public can play in assuring continued public access along our historic and treasured rights of way. The answer is quite simple: attendance at our meetings to discern the committee’s strategy on a particular issue, which is always carefully planned to address both public and private concerns; and support in the field in following through on that strategy, while avoiding actions that might jeopardize the hoped-for outcome.

Despite only meeting seven times in 2020, the committee is pleased to highlight the following specific achievements:

- Ongoing trail maintenance achieved through four planned work days at Thomas Road along Waring Field, Steep Bank Landing, Andrews Woods, the Kieran Preserve, Reeds Lane, Sacramento Avenue, Pine Avenue and the Atlantic Path and many of its access points.
- Successful advocacy for Andrews Woods to be transferred to the Conservation Commission for management, and for the bridge at Long Beach connecting to

the Seaview Avenue parking lot to be in place from April 1st to November 30th when Long Beach parking is not available for the general public.

- The development of a new access trail on a right of way at the top of Atlantic Avenue into the Headlands.
- The recruitment of a graphic design student to take on the redesign of the “Blue Book” which describes many Rockport rights of way, with reprinting and digital access planned for 2021.
- Knotweed removal at Reeds Lane and Gale Avenue, with financial support from the Rockport Garden Club.
- Investigation of an underground water main leak flooding part of the Atlantic Path which was eventually confirmed and corrected with DPW assistance.
- Collaboration with numerous property owners to resolve rights-of-way issues or confusion.
- Welcoming a new committee member, with one more on the way.

The committee members wish to thank all volunteers who gave time to trail work and advocacy; the members of the public who take the time to attend our meetings and support our strategies for maintaining public access; the Department of Public Works for their continued help in removing trail-clearing debris that is too much for our volunteers to manage; and, most especially, so many collaborative, gracious and proactive property owners who support our work to ensure public access.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan W. Ives, Chair

Tom Mikus, Vice Chair (Chair until July 2020)

Monica Lawton, Member (Vice Chair until July 2020)

John Cunningham, Member

Mary Devaney, Member

Lori Morrow, Member

Mary Jane Sawyer, Member

Dr. Theresa Risolo, Member (since September 2020)